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ABSTRACT

When Richard Henry Pratt founded the Carlisle Indian Boarding School, he felt that assimilation of American Indians was the only alternative to annihilation. Much of the training at Carlisle was intended to break all connections between students and their families. However, the students did have opportunities to record their stories, ideas, and opinions in their school newspapers, even as they were controlled by white staff members. For Pratt's system to flourish, he intended that some graduates from Carlisle and other off-reservation boarding schools would either work at the schools as teachers or return to their reservations to continue his mission. Pratt's objectives required that the students learn both English and a marketable trade. However, some graduates used their newly-developed skills to decry assimilation policies and to denounce the methods practiced at the schools. The continuation of this criticism is apparent in modern Native American literature. In personal narratives, school newspapers, and later in autobiographical essays and stories, the legacy of Carlisle students was preserved and passed on to the present generation of Native American authors. In this way, the "enemy language" was used to continue the war with the pen and to ensure the survival of Indian cultures and heritage. (TD)

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THE CARLISLE INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOL AND ITS LITERARY LEGACY: THE WAR WITH THE PEN

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The Carlisle Indian Boarding School and Its Literary Legacy: The War with the Pen

Richard Henry Pratt established the Carlisle Indian Boarding School on the principle that total assimilation into white society was the only way in which Native American Indians could survive amid the ever-increasing numbers of white immigrants. This paper first describes the founding and development of the Carlisle Indian School and then addresses the literary legacy that it initiated which has led to the preservation and recognition of Native American cultures in literary terms: not at all the aim of the boarding school system.

The Carlisle Indian Boarding School has, since its conception, invoked passionate debate about the motives and aims of its founder, teachers, administrators, and sponsors. Richard Henry Pratt established the school on the predicate that total assimilation into white society was the only way in which Native American Indians could survive amid the ever-increasing numbers of white immigrants. Although Pratt did not feel that racial extinction was necessary, he did consider Indians to be inferior to white people, and devoted much of his life trying to ensure that

Indian savagery was overcome by the forces of "civilization." This was achieved by removing Indian children from their homes to a web of off-reservation schools and immersing them in the culture of white society.

For assimilation to be successful, Indian children had to be separated from their cultural ties. The staff at Carlisle began this process as soon as the young students arrived at the school by stripping them of all outward signs of their heritage, and forcing them to look, act, and speak like their white teachers. Although some of the historical documentation about the Carlisle Indian School promotes the notion that many of the children were happy and grateful for their educational opportunities, there is much evidence of a quiet, written resistance by the students to the attempted extermination of their culture and heritage. The Native Americans' war with the pen began with these school children, who wrote of their experiences in their family letters, school newspapers and, in some cases, autobiographies. Their stories remain alive in the Native American literature of today which is steeped in Indian myths and legends. Themes such as loss of language, relationships with earth and family, problems of separation, alienation, and identity, which were all affected by the

Carlisle Boarding School System, are addressed with strength and determination by these writers.

The resolve of outsiders to "educate" the indigenous peoples of the Americas has been unyielding ever since the first settlers arrived to colonize the continent. Indeed, the main aim of the French and Spanish missionaries in the early 1600s was to neutralize native resistance by "diminishing indigenous cultural integrity to the point of nonexistence" (Noriega, 1992, p. 371). Throughout the following centuries, education was used as a means to disrupt native societies by creating an educated elite which would adopt and promote European ideals.

In the years following the War of Independence, colonizers were obsessed with the idea of expanding their territorial holdings. The main obstacles in their way were the natives whose lives and livelihoods were inextricably connected to the land the Europeans wished to confiscate. Armed with preconceptions of Indian savagery and inferiority, the white settlers offered the Indians two choices: "civilization" or extinction. As an attempt to avoid violence as much as possible, government officials made funds available to offer educational services to the Indians in return for treaties and alliances. For several decades, missionary teachers

tried many educational methods to transform the Indians while keeping tribal family units intact, but as J. D. C. Atkins, the U.S. Commissioner of Indian Affairs, said in his 1886 annual report: "The greatest difficulty is experienced in freeing the children attending day schools from the language and habits of their untutored and often savage parents. When they return to their homes at night, and on Saturdays and Sundays, and are among their own surroundings, they relapse more or less into their former moral and mental stupor" (qtd. in Noriega, 1992, p. 379).

In the light of Atkins' findings, the US Commissioner of Education, John Eaton, Jr., suggested that a boarding-school environment, although much more expensive to operate, would afford better results by removing the native children from the cultural contamination of their families and homes completely. Moreover, government policymakers decided that the schools would adopt "the penal procedures developed to break the will of some of the most "recalcitrant" of the indigenous resistance leaders" (Noriega, 1992, p. 380). Thus, when the Carlisle Indian School, in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, was opened in November 1879, Captain Richard Henry Pratt, who had been commandant of Fort Marion Prison, was appointed as its superintendent.

Captain Pratt was not new to the idea of educating Indians. Indeed, he had piloted a scheme at Fort Marion which transformed Indian inmates into students. There, adopting the role of a father-figure, Pratt treated his charges as children, teaching them that obedience to his rules could result in some degree of freedom. So Pratt established the new School with the presumption that Native American Indians could only survive by total assimilation into 'civilized' white society. Indeed, the Carlisle school slogan was, "To civilize the Indian, get him into civilization. To keep him civilized, let him stay".

The success of the off-reservation boarding schools depended initially, of course, upon attracting the requisite number of students. While some parents voluntarily sent their children away to be educated in the ways of the white man, feeling that assimilation was the only way that their children could survive in this "new" America, others according to annual reports of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, had to be persuaded or forced to give up their offspring. Persuasion came in the form of withholding food and clothing, and sometimes even imprisonment (Adams, 1995, p. 211). The Indians had great difficulty entrusting the welfare of their children to the same people who had deceived

them over land rights, and who had broken treaty after treaty. Pratt's answer to this charge was to suggest that the problem lay in the Indians' lack of understanding of the English language: if they had been able to read English, they would have understood the treaties. He thus reasoned that the Indian children would be in a much better position to look after their own interests if they were educated at the boarding schools and learned to speak English. According to Pratt's memoirs, he personally had no need to use force to achieve his quota of children: "The Indians were so enthusiastic that repeatedly parents who had not tried to get their children into the party came forward and asked to have their children go, and I could have had several times as many as my authority allowed" (Pratt, 1964, p. 227).

From the moment they arrived at Carlisle, Indian children had all outward signs of their native heritage taken from them: their hair was cut, their clothes were exchanged for military-style uniforms, Indian names became anglicized, and Indian languages, both spoken and written, were banned. At the same time as these tactics were used to distance the children from their native cultures, an educational program was developed to prepare them for a life of assimilation (Landis, pp. 3-4).

The first step in distancing the children from their tribal identity was to cut the boys' hair. This physical and psychological attack was a terrifying experience. In *My People the Sioux*, Luther Standing Bear, a member of the first class of Carlisle, recalls how he felt when it was his turn to be shorn: "it hurt my feelings to such an extent that the tears came into my eyes" (p. 140). The acquisition of new clothes did not seem to cause the Indians the same trauma as did having their hair cut. Indeed, Standing Bear remembers fondly his excitement at receiving his new uniform: "We heard that we were soon to have white men's clothes. We were all very excited and anxious when this was announced to us. […] As soon as we had received our outfits, we ran to our rooms to dress up" (p. 142). With their new haircuts and uniform-style clothing, the Carlisle Indian students were beginning to look like their white counterparts. Hence, the first part of Pratt's agenda was underway. It was now time to go beyond the visible changes and begin to sever the Indians' spiritual connection to their homeland and heritage.

One of the first assignments on the academic schedule was the allocation of English names to the new students. There was, of course, more than one reason behind this practice. First, many of

the Indian names were very difficult for the teachers to pronounce, and second, land allocation and the promise of citizenship necessitated a clear family lineage which could be understood by the government agencies. There were, according to David Wallace Adams, several methods used to select names for the students. Some original names, which were easy to pronounce, remained unchanged, some were translated literally, while other students received totally new names (Adams, 1995, p. 139).

The next academic objective of the curriculum was to instruct the children in the English language. This posed many problems both for students and teachers, and was a source of immense frustration. But if the proponents of the boarding-school system were going to succeed in their mission to prepare Indian children for a life of assimilation into white culture, a way had to be found to encourage the use and mastery of English. Thus, school officials announced that students were to be forbidden to speak any language other than English, and that the punishment for infringement of this rule would be severe (Adams, 1995, p. 140).

The aim of the educational program at Carlisle was to prepare the Indian children for assimilation into white society, and this meant that they not only had to learn the English language, but

had to be taught a marketable trade. To this end, the students' working day was divided between academic instruction and manual labor. The technical part of the schedule served two purposes: to provide students with the opportunity to learn a useful trade, and to produce goods for sale to offset the cost of the program. At Carlisle, boys were offered tuition in wagon building, shoemaking, tinsmithing, carpentry, painting, tailoring, and harness making. The syllabus for girls included sewing, ironing, cooking, canning, child care, cleaning, stenography, typing, and bookkeeping (Adams, 1995, pp. 149—50).

By 1900, the Indian boarding school program was, on paper, a tremendous success with over 21,000 students in residence. But one of the most visible results of Pratt's Carlisle experiment was the disastrous effects which this educational program had on Indian children and their families. Although each student spent several years learning English, command of the language was often not proficient enough to secure employment away from the schools. The young people were not ready for life in white communities, but at the same time, they had lost fluency in their native languages. These young adults, after serving their time in the government boarding schools, were totally unprepared both

for the white world and for their own. Fortunately, some of the students did have a sufficient grasp of the English language to enable them to write their boarding school experiences. These stories, together with personal narratives from people who came into contact with the students, comprise the first stage of establishing an Indian literacy legacy.

Without any first-hand evidence it would be difficult to gauge accurately the apprehension, excitement, hopes and fears of the students, and Richard Pratt's memoirs would stand as the only account of the successes and failures of the program. Fortunately, however, Luther Standing Bear recorded his life story in three autobiographical books: *My Indian Boyhood*, written for and dedicated to the boys and girls of America; *My People the Sioux*; and *Land of the Spotted Eagle*. These works, besides tracing his own personal life, describe the beliefs, customs, and values of Indian people, especially the Lakota. Standing Bear, by describing how he and his playmates were traditionally schooled, by revealing his own personal hopes and fears as a child, and by explaining his Carlisle education and his views on white-Indian relations, was one of the first Indians to provide an account of his people from an Indian perspective. His portrait of his home life, of his relationship

with his family and friends, and of the freedom enjoyed by Indian children helps explain their alienation and fear when they were taken from their homelands and family to be educated at Carlisle.

To understand fully the emotional trauma experienced by the Indian children during this process, it is necessary to examine the home life from which they came. In *Land of the Spotted Eagle*, Standing Bear describes his childhood and the education he received at the hands of his parents. Although the traditional Indian way of life was in decline by the time he was born in the 1860s, Standing Bear or Ota K'te (Plenty Kill), as his parents called him, was trained to be a hunter, a warrior, and a respectful member of his tribe. For the first six years of his life, Standing Bear, like all the other Lakota children, was cared for solely by his mother.

As soon as a Lakota child was old enough to walk, parents and grandparents spent time teaching through example and play. Respect for elders, obedience, truthfulness, and kindness were all virtues with which the children were surrounded. Grandmothers were greatly involved in the care of the little ones, and routinely acted as cooks, teachers, and advisors. Lakota fathers were generally very proud of their sons and Standing Bear remembers fondly the times he and his father worked and played together:

everything which the mother taught, the father reinforced, but included in his training were the skills which would transform the boy into a Lakota warrior (*Land of the Spotted Eagle,* 1978, p.10). Standing Bear recalls that throughout his boyhood he wanted to be brave like his father, "Dangers and responsibilities were bound to come, and I wanted to meet them like a man. I looked forward to the days of the warpath, not as a calling nor for the purpose of slaying my fellowman, but solely to prove my worth to myself and my people" (*Land of the Spotted Eagle, 1978,* p. 14).

On first consideration, it is difficult to understand why Standing Bear would have chosen to leave his home, where he had been perfectly happy, to attend boarding school at Carlisle. He admits in *My People the Sioux* that white people were mistrusted and thought of as the enemy, yet he volunteered to join the first group to travel East. Standing Bear recalled his father's words to him and saw this as the ideal opportunity to make him proud, "'Son be brave! Die on the battle-field if necessary away from home. It is better to die young than to get old and sick and then die'" (*My People the Sioux,* 1975, p. 124). Standing Bear had witnessed his father's acceptance of the inevitable domination of

the white way of life, and looked upon this new situation as the perfect way to prove his bravery.

Everything about Carlisle was, however, anathema to Standing Bear and to the other children who had been educated by their parents in accordance with traditional Indian methods and ideology. As for their personal comforts, they initially had no proper beds to sleep in and not enough food to eat, and were given uncomfortable clothes to wear. During the daytime, they were confined to classrooms or workshops and had to adhere to a schedule, the divisions of which were marked by the ringing of a bell. These children were used to following the cycles of the Sun and the Moon; now they had to learn to divide the day into hours, minutes, and seconds.

Considering the disastrous racial and cultural implications of his educational programs, the fondness with which his students remember Richard Pratt is sometimes difficult to understand. Nevertheless, the Indian prisoners at Fort Marion, and the children who attended Carlisle, seemed to look upon Pratt as a father-figure who had their best interests at heart (Adams, 1995, p. 46). To the prisoners, he was a savior amid a sea of enemies, danger, and hopelessness; while his ability to persuade many tribal chiefs and

other parents that his program was their only hope for survival, physical if not cultural, ensured their support for the school and his agenda.

Although he had many arguments with the bureaucrats in the government, especially at the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Richard Pratt was the perfect diplomat when it came to dealing with Indian parents and their children. Their co-operation in his plans for assimilating the Indians was crucial. He encouraged and welcomed visitors, and took the time to promote the school and its achievements to those parents who made the journey from faraway Indian homelands to see their children. When Chief Standing Bear arrived at the school, Pratt not only allowed father and son to talk in their own native language, but also took the Chief to many of the neighboring cities to show him the progress in the eastern section of the country. The reason behind this seemingly generous gesture was to prove to the Chief that the expansion of white civilization was unstoppable, and that assimilation was the only way for Indians to survive its onslaught. The ploy was successful. On their return to Carlisle, Chief Standing Bear told his son that he must learn all that he could from the white people, and that he would send his other children to Carlisle.

Luther Standing Bear became a model student, concentrating on his studies and his vocational trade, tinsmithing; eventually, he was selected by Captain Pratt and his teachers to work in John Wanamaker's department store in Philadelphia. This was a great honor for Luther Standing Bear who was determined that he would make his employers proud of him (*My People the Sioux,* 1975, p. 183). In this he excelled and he was promoted within the company more rapidly than anyone before him. Pratt could not have hoped for a better ambassador for Carlisle and his assimilation program.

Eventually, however, the time came for Standing Bear to return home to his own people. He worked as an interpreter, a teacher, and even at times as a lay Episcopal preacher. But it was not long after his return to the reservation that Standing Bear realized that he could be of no help to his people while living among them: "on the reservation I was only a helpless Indian, and was not considered any better than any of the uneducated Indians—that is, according to the views of the white agent in charge of the reservation. [...] So I had to do one of two things—keep my mouth shut or fight the agent all the time (*My People the Sioux,* 1975, p. 277). Indeed, Standing Bear spent the rest of his

life fighting for his rights and those of his people. In his later years he was persuaded to write his autobiography. This he did with the help of Clyde Champion, E. A. Brininstool, his niece Was-te-win, and her husband William Dittmar. If it had not been for his Carlisle education, Standing Bear's story could never have been told in this way, nor perhaps could he have served his people as he did, but the final words of *Land of the Spotted Eagle* indicate that he considered the price he paid for the white man's education as too high: "if today I had a young mind to direct, to start on the journey of life, [...] I would, for its welfare, unhesitatingly set that child's feet in the path of my forefathers. I would raise him to be an Indian!" (Nabokov, 1978, p. 221).

Richard Pratt had hoped that those Carlisle students who elected to return home would find the gap between the reservation customs and their new lifestyles too great to overcome and would soon make new, successful lives for themselves in the cities. Unfortunately for Pratt and his advocates, however, many students immediately abandoned their training, grew their hair long, re-learned their native languages, and re-adopted the traditional ways. Others took their boarding school education and used it to further

the prosperity and unique identity of their tribes despite the continual encroachment of white society.

The Carlisle students were kept informed about former pupils through articles and letters which were printed in the school newspapers. Although the purpose of these publications was primarily to allow the student printers the opportunity to practice appropriate skills, their content adds a further dimension to Carlisle's literary legacy. Throughout its almost 40 years of existence, the Carlisle Indian School distributed an in-house publication, the contents of which encompassed letters and articles written by students, reports on topics of special interest to the staff and children of the school, and reprints of government documents and speeches which were relevant to the Indian population. The school publication went though many changes, including nine different names, and the format grew both in physical size and maturity as the students became more familiar with the printing process and with writing in the English language.

During Pratt's tenure as Superintendent of the School, the school newspaper became a major weapon in his armory against his opponents (Haller, 1997, p. 5), and he ensured that copies were sent to members of the government, Indian agencies, local

officials, and other newspapers, in the hope that his message of assimilation would reach every corner of the country.

In the very first edition of *School News* in June 1880, the editor Samuel Townsend, a Pawnee Indian boy, wrote, "We put every thing in this paper that the Indian boys write for us. Not any white man's writing but all the Indian boy's writing [...] We want to show the people how they can do. Some have been going to school but a few months and some have been going to school for several years and they can do most everything now" (*School News,* June 1880, p. 2). The message was that this was to be a publication by Indians about Indians.

As the school's student population became more attuned to the system, proficiency in the English language increased, and the printers' skills developed, so the nature of the school publications matured. *Eadle Keatah Toh*, which means 'Big Morning Star,' was produced alongside *School News*, and carried some illustrations, reports on Indian affairs, and reprints of newspaper articles which were thought to be of interest to the staff and students.

In 1884 *Eadle Keatah Toh* changed its name to *The Morning Star*, increased in size to eight pages, and began to include yet more advanced articles which highlighted general

Indian issues and government reports relevant to the school community. Whereas Samuel Townsend had written in June 1880 that his publication was totally Indian in content and production, the description of *The Morning Star* stated that it was "Published Monthly in the Interest of Indian Education and Civilization—NOT EDITED, BUT—PRINTED BY INDIAN BOYS" (*The Morning Star,* October and November 1882, p. 4). Clearly, the emphasis had changed considerably and, by studying the content and language of the included articles, it is evident that the intended audience for the publication was no longer just the children.

Throughout the forty years of their existence, the publications of the Carlisle Indian School provided a platform for the dissemination of stories and information by and about Indians, and of subjects in which they had interest. In addition to offering students an opportunity to practice their language and literary skills, and to providing information about their school, Richard Pratt used the newspapers to advance his assimilation policies and practices, and to promote them among the American people. Although the production of the publications was overseen by members of Carlisle's staff, and therefore probably censored to ensure that the outside world would only received positive

information about the school, the children benefited by being able to feel part of their people's 'success story.' The publications of Carlisle catered to two very separate but dependent interests: the educational and social needs of the students, and the distribution of Pratt's assimilation message, which ensured political and philanthropical support. They were also used at times to counteract or condemn criticism of the school which dissenting former students sometimes expressed.

For Richard Pratt's assimilation policies and the work carried out at the Carlisle Indian School to be successful, positive results of the education system had to be conveyed to the American people. While all types of employment were welcomed and applauded, the graduates who really offered visible endorsement of Pratt's project were those who returned to the boarding schools to play an active role in the assimilation effort. There could be no better recommendation for Pratt's work than to see Indian boarding school graduates spreading the assimilation message amid their own people. Among those who accepted employment at Carlisle was Gertrude Simmons Bonnin, who taught English. Although Bonnin had not experienced the Sioux way of life before white people encroached upon their territory, the

elders of the tribe, and especially her mother, "sought to instill in the young child, a hatred for all things Anglo" (Welch, 1985, p. 2). This influence was to affect every major decision and action in Bonnin's adult life.

Just as Luther Standing Bear recorded his boarding school experiences, Bonnin has described all the disappointment, pain, humiliation, and degradation of her school days in her autobiographical writings. From her first night away from home when she "was as frightened and bewildered as the captured young of a wild creature" (Zitkala-Sa, 1985, p. 44) to the death from disease of a classmate which disturbed her intensely, she wrote that the sad memories of those days "left so long a shadow that it darkens the path of years that have since gone by" (Zitkala-Sa, 1985, p. 67). But Bonnin was not the type of person to be totally subdued by the pressures of school life, and she sought out opportunities to rebel.

In 1899 Gertrude Bonnin accepted Richard Pratt's offer of a teaching position at Carlisle. This decision could not have been easily made, and after her own unhappy years in boarding school, her very presence at Carlisle must have brought back unpleasant memories. Furthermore, any impressions that she was 'buying

into' Pratt's assimilation policy must have caused her considerable discomfort.

With her fine command of the English language and her musical talents, which had become highly developed during her college days, Gertrude Bonnin was exactly the type of teacher Pratt needed for his school. Not only would she be a role model for the students, but her accomplishments in the white world were also visible confirmation that his assimilation dreams were becoming a reality. Unfortunately though, their relationship was, for each, both tumultuous and difficult.

While Pratt was convinced that in Bonnin he had at his disposal a new weapon in Carlisle's educational and political arsenal, Bonnin felt that her position at the school would be beneficial to her future. Bonnin's main reason for accepting employment at Carlisle was, most certainly, not any great desire to teach. Nor did she believe in Pratt's methods of educating her people. Her teaching position, however, gave her enough money to remain in the East where she could showcase her talents to those who dictated national policy. According to Deborah Welch, Bonnin believed that "only by reaching the hearts and minds of these people [...] could she convince them that Indian peoples

possessed abilities equal to those of Whites" (Welch, 1991, p. 17). While working at Carlisle, she also contacted literary societies and publishing companies, and her first article, "Impressions of an Indian Childhood" appeared in the January 1900 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly* (Welch, 1991, p. 18). For her writing career, Bonnin assumed the pen name, Zitkala-Sa.

Richard Pratt was, at first, unconcerned by his employees' extra-curricular activities, and even admitted that in many ways Bonnin's first story reinforced his views that Indians, when educated and acculturated, could make a valuable contribution to white society. Bonnin's description of the poverty and suffering of her people also conformed with Pratt's disapproval of the reservation system (Welch, 1991, p. 18). Bonnin's later articles, however, were to cause Pratt great concern. He had hired a quiet, studious, and assimilated Indian girl, and now had to deal with a confident woman who was becoming increasingly willing to declare her Indian pride. To rid himself of this subversive embarrassment, and to separate Bonnin from her literary companions, Pratt devised the perfect solution: he sent her West to recruit new students for the school.

At the end of the spring term in 1900, Bonnin travelled West towards her homeland. In many ways this enforced sojourn among her own people only served to deepen Bonnin's determination to become an active and outspoken advocate for Indian rights. Her mother and brother were destitute with inadequate housing, little food, and no money, because the old woman was now unable to work, and her son's job had been commandeered by a white man.

In the Autumn of 1900, Bonnin briefly returned to Carlisle to work again for Richard Pratt. But her attitude to Carlisle and its staff had changed, and her days there were numbered. She could no longer endure the white teachers who belittled the students and used the school to further their own agendas (Welch, 1991, pp. 24-5). And of the philanthropists who visited the school, she said, "few there are who have paused to question whether real life or long-lasting death lies beneath this semblance of civilization" (Zitkala-Sa, 1985, p. 99). For Bonnin to survive, both spiritually and in the literary world, it was necessary for her to move away from this place which had caused her and the Indian children so much pain. In late 1900, she left Carlisle to pursue her writing and her music.

Several stories, including "The Soft-Hearted Sioux," were published by Bonnin in 1901 and addressed the problems of Indian children who had been educated by the whites, and had then tried to return to their homelands. Richard Pratt was furious and denounced the stories as "trash" and their author as "worse than pagan" (Bonnin, 1901). Bonnin was deeply hurt by Pratt's criticism, but was equally determined to express her own beliefs.

More than any other Indian woman of her time, Gertrude Bonnin was potentially the perfect example of an Indian child who had been removed from family influences at an early age and assimilated through education. She obviously loved living and working in the East, and excelled in many aspects of the literary field. If Richard Pratt's dreams of a fully acculturated Indian population was to become a reality, then this was the type of student he needed to produce. It would then not have been long before there was no more need for white teachers, because Indian graduates would simply reverse roles and take up teaching positions. Thus the process would become self-fulfilling. Unfortunately for Pratt and his program, (but fortunately for the Indians) this dream was not to become reality. Indians like Gertrude Bonnin were far too strongly connected to their heritage

to be able to sever ties as easily as he predicted, and their own experiences of boarding school life not only discouraged them from perpetuating or endorsing the system, but also fostered in them a need to attack it at every opportunity. These graduates of the Carlisle Boarding School system are the ancestors of today's Indian writers, whose pride in their heritage and outrage at the treatment of their race at the hands of the white invaders resounds throughout their writings.

The Carlisle Indian School, although closed for more than eighty years, has provided a legacy which lives on in the works of present day Indian writers. Out of the misery of lost families, homelands, cultural heritage, native skills, and language has emerged a literature which has been enriched by the pain of those experiences. Following the oral tradition of their ancestors, the Indian writers of today blend the past with the present in a continuum of inherited memory. But, unlike the oral stories of their ancestors which, according to N. Scott Momaday, were always one generation away from extinction, modern Indian literature uses the written word, and the white-man's language, to ensure that its message will endure, and will reach audiences far beyond Indian linguistic and cultural boundaries (Momaday, 1998, p. 28).

In *The Road to Disappearance*, Angie Debo recounts the story of a young Indian from Arkansas who decided to use his enforced education, and especially his command of the English language, to fight for his rights, and those of his people; "Although I am a school boy yet I feel a great interest in the welfare of my people, and some future day, if I live, I expect to take the pen and fight for my country" (Debo, 1970, p. 250). This war with the pen is still being waged by Indian writers. But it must be remembered that the struggle for Indian survival has been continuing ever since white settlers first set foot on this continent. Richard Pratt took part in this battle, both as a soldier on the frontier, and as an educator. Indeed, in a letter to President Rutherford B. Hayes, in which he expressed concern that his request for more staff for his school had been declined, he stated "I am at this time, "fighting" a greater number of "the enemies of civilization" than the whole of my regiment put together, and I know further that I am fighting them with a thousand times more hopes of success" (Pratt, 1964, p. 251).

Jo Harjo and Gloria Bird recently edited an anthology of short stories and poetry by Indian women entitled *Reinventing the Enemy Language*. This title reinforces the idea that the "war with the pen" is still active. There are now many Indian writers who

have chosen to use their literary skills to tell the story of their people, and to highlight the plight of those who feel that they have no voice in modern America. With her first-hand experience of an oppressive education system and an outing program, Laura Tohe has brought her own feelings of outrage and defiance to her work. And D'Arcy McNickle was one of the very first Indians to use fiction to record his story.

D'Arcy McNickle, having dedicated his life to educating white people about Indians, is described by many as the grandfather of modern Native American Literature. It was against his mother's wishes that McNickle was sent to the Chemawa Indian School in Oregon. Like Carlisle, the aim of this school was to promote the superiority of the white culture, and to attempt to force Indian children to reject their native heritage. The hardships endured by Indian children, while confined in institutions like these, is recounted many times in McNickle's novels and short stories which deal, primarily, with the historical reality of the indigenous people of the west and their interaction with those who settled there. Much of the content of his works stems from personal experiences from McNickle's childhood, and from his lifetime of work on behalf of American Indians.

The novels and short stories of D'Arcy McNickle describe a progression of misunderstandings between the Indian and Anglo-American cultures which often resulted in tragedy. The white government's attempts to enforce assimilation of Indians into white society had failed, and it was time for the natives to use the language of the newcomers: a language which had been forced upon them in schools like Carlisle. D'Arcy McNickle was one of the first of a new type of Indian who transferred the oral tradition into a written medium which could reach a wide, non-Indian audience. In this way, such writers were able to adapt to new circumstances which helped ensure cultural survival. Although McNickle, like many others, considered any integration as a cultural loss, John Lloyd Purdy points out in *Word Ways: The Novels of D'Arcy McNickle*, that "Through his work, he found just the opposite, and this revelation guided the efforts of a lifetime" (p. 141). From those early beginnings, there is now a strong Indian voice which strives to ensure that the indigenous people do not have to assimilate to survive and that, despite the efforts of the early missionaries and government agents who tried to "bury the Indian to save the man", there are a great many talented Indian writers who refuse to be either invisible or silent.

Laura Tohe's *No Parole Today* is a collection of poems and stories dedicated to, among others, "all those who survived Indian schools everywhere" (dedication page), and its introduction includes a quotation from the speech by Richard Henry Pratt in which he states, "In Indian civilization I am a Baptist, because I believe in immersing the Indians in our civilization, and when we get them under holding them there until they are thoroughly soaked" (Tohe, 1999, p. ix). Tohe continues her introduction in the form of a letter in reply to that speech, explaining that, by their focus on assimilation, Pratt and the government officials who formulated the colonization policies had a devastating effect on the Indian peoples. These policies, according to Tohe, were intended "to turn Indian people into *civilized* white American citizens, who would dress, worship, think, and hold the values of the dominant culture, (and) still affect us today" (Tohe, 1999, p. ix).

Although Laura Tohe's school experiences began as recently as the late 1950s, many of her accounts are very similar to those of Luther Standing Bear and his fellow students who attended Carlisle Indian School in the late 1870s. Military-style routines of roll call, work routines, and marching between

classrooms were, for Tohe, also the order of the day (Tohe, 1999, p. ix).

No Parole Today began as a class assignment in which Tohe was asked to write a prison poem. Tohe's writing leaves the reader with the impression that she equates the quality of life which her people endure to that of a prisoner who has been sentenced to life without parole: the very title of the work emphasizes this point. It can therefore be deduced that Laura Tohe sees Native Americans as trapped in an endless prison of hopelessness.

Her poetry, however, is not without hope and comprises a mixture of English and Diné, with the latter usually translated into English. She writes most of her work in English, which she has at times described as "the language of the enemy", because this affords her a wider audience than work in her own language would attract. Passages of Diné are inserted to show that the language is still flourishing, and to give readers an opportunity to experience its richness. Tohe's school experiences left her with the impression that her way of life and language were drifting into oblivion. Today, however, the reservation schools include programs for teaching children their native language and culture. Indeed, Tohe

comments on the irony of a government system which one hundred years ago was funding Pratt's assimilation program, but now provides financial aid "to help preserve and revitalize the languages" (Tohe, 1999, p. x) that it was attempting to annihilate.

Because Laura Tohe and her fellow writers have refused to be silent, their native voice is no longer in danger of drowning in Pratt's baptismal waters of assimilation. Tohe comments that she and others like her have not "gone away quietly into the sunset, or assimilated into mainstream culture the way (Pratt) envisioned" (Tohe, 1999, p. xi). "At Mexican Springs", which is the last piece in the book, ends with the words "and I will live to tell my children these things" (Tohe, 1999, p. 47). This is Laura Tohe's personal commitment to the preservation of the language and heritage of her people.

When Richard Henry Pratt founded the Carlisle Indian Boarding School, he felt that assimilation was the only alternative to annihilation. Although many people, including some Indians thought that he was totally committed to securing the welfare and future of the Indian people, he had no respect for Indian culture and heritage. Indeed, much of the training at Carlisle was intended to break all connections between students and their families. The

students did, however, have an opportunity to record their stories, ideas, and opinions in their school newspapers, even as they were controlled by white members of staff.

For Pratt's system to flourish, he intended that some graduates from Carlisle and the other off-reservation boarding schools would either work at the schools as teachers, or would return to their reservations to continue his mission. Unfortunately for Pratt, however, many graduates used their newly-developed skills to decry the assimilation policies, and to denounce the methods practiced at the schools: the continuation of this criticism is apparent in modern Native American literature.

Through the writings of the Carlisle students in personal narratives, the school newspapers, and later in autobiographical essays and stories, their legacy has been preserved and passed on to the present generation of Native American authors. By using the 'enemy language' for their own purposes, these writers continue the war with the pen, and ensure that their children are steeped in the cultures and heritage of the Indian peoples.

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